



Published: 08.06.2008

# Most in primaries balk at tax for transportation

**By Daniel Scarpinato***ARIZONA DAILY STAR*

A majority of Southern Arizona legislative candidates in the Sept. 2 primary are opposed to a 1-cent sales tax increase to pay for new roads and public transit.

A ballot measure in November will ask voters to do just that. But while the measure is backed heavily by many Democrats, including Gov. Janet Napolitano, several running in the primary have staked out a hard stance against it as they look to win support from voters.

Of the 14 Democrats running in legislative primaries in Pima and Pinal counties, seven said in a survey by the Arizona Daily Star that they back the measure. Five are opposed. One candidate was undecided, and another did not answer the questionnaire.

And among the nine Republicans running in state House and Senate contested primaries, all said they are opposed to raising the sales tax.

The "TIME" initiative — short for Transportation and Infrastructure Moving Arizona's Economy — is projected to raise \$42 billion over 30 years and would be divided among state highway, rail and transit projects, and local projects if approved by voters.

But increasing the state tax from 5.6 cents on every dollar spent to 6.6 cents is too much for some candidates to swallow.

"This is an outrage," said Democrat John Kromko, a former state lawmaker who is running in a primary against incumbent Reps. Olivia Cajero Bedford and Phil Lopes. Two of the three, running in West Side District 27, will advance through the primary.

"People will pay for freeways when they buy shoes for their kids, but the big truck on that freeway will contribute nothing," Kromko said in his response, pointing out that gasoline is exempt from the sales tax.

Lopes said he supports the initiative, and while Cajero Bedford was undecided in her questionnaire — saying she would have preferred a half-cent increase — she now has come around to supporting it.

"We have to start doing something, as long as Pima County will be getting its fair share," she said in an interview.

In southern Tucson's District 29, three Democrats in the seven-way primary for two House seats are opposed to the measure.

Daniel Patterson pointed to two issues that jar opponents. The actual 1-cent increase amounts to a 17.85 percent increase in the current state sales tax. Also, organizers agreed not to push for impact fees for developers in exchange for \$100,000 to help pay for signature gathering and a commitment for more money to campaign for the measure.

"I support needed transportation improvements but cannot support raising the sales tax (nearly) 18 percent in this tough economy, especially while wealthy developers get an inside deal to avoid paying fair impact fees," Patterson said in his response. Sales taxes, he said, "hurt lower-income people the most."

But one of his rivals, Ephraim Cruz, said the tax is needed because the money "Southern Arizona stands to gain from this proposal cannot be found elsewhere."

On StarNet: For the primary candidates' answers on this issue and more:  
[azstarnet.com/special/08candidates](http://azstarnet.com/special/08candidates)

For Republicans opposing the measure, their answers reflected strong stances against most any form of a tax hike.

State Senate candidate Al Melvin, running in North Side District 26, said he would prefer to see toll roads built and run by private firms, identifying Interstate 10 between Tucson and Phoenix as "perfect for this concept."

His competitor in the primary, Republican state Rep. Pete Hershberger, was also opposed, saying "a smaller increase or a gas tax increase that impacts the user would be preferable."

On StarNet: For the primary candidates' answers on this issue and more: [azstarnet.com/special/08candidates](http://azstarnet.com/special/08candidates)

• *Contact reporter Daniel Scarpinato at 307-4339 or [dscarpinato@azstarnet.com](mailto:dscarpinato@azstarnet.com).*

All content copyright © 1999-2008 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.